

Today Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) sent a letter to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator R. David Paulison concerning trailers issued to flood victims in Iowa that were recently reported to have unsafe levels of formaldehyde. Rep. Braley requested in the letter that FEMA produce the original test results for each trailer in question and renewed a call that FEMA, or a reputable independent lab, retest these trailers to determine whether or not they are safe to live in.

Washington, DC - Today Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) sent a letter to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator R. David Paulison concerning trailers issued to flood victims in Iowa that were recently reported to have unsafe levels of formaldehyde. Rep. Braley requested in the letter that FEMA produce the original test results for each trailer in question and renewed a call that FEMA, or a reputable independent lab, retest these trailers to determine whether or not they are safe to live in.

"FEMA has a pattern of health and safety problems with the trailers they issue, from unsafe levels of formaldehyde in previous disasters, to large amounts of mold found in some Iowa trailers, and now to reports of dangerous formaldehyde in even more Iowa trailers," Braley said. "Given this record, it is imperative FEMA go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that their trailers are safe, by making public all records of formaldehyde testing and retesting the trailers in question. Openness and full disclosure by FEMA is the only responsible way to resolve this problem.

"I'm disappointed and disturbed that FEMA has reacted to reports of unsafe formaldehyde levels with more secrecy and roadblocks, rather than a willingness to put the facts out into the open.

"Flood victims in Iowa have had to deal with many challenges over the past several months. The last thing these families should have to worry about is whether the trailers they live in will put their health at risk."

Cedar Rapids, Iowa television station KGAN recently reported that tests of 20 trailers issued by FEMA to flood victims in Iowa found they all exceeded FEMA's own standards for safe levels of formaldehyde. There are over 60 inhabited FEMA trailers in Iowa's 1st District

The text of the letter is below:

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October 23, 2008

R. David Paulison

Administrator

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

500 C Street SW

Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Paulison:

As you know, Cedar Rapids, Iowa television station KGAN recently reported that independent tests of 20 FEMA trailers in Cedar Rapids found that all tested trailers exceeded FEMA's standard for safe levels of formaldehyde. The station's findings are disturbing and unacceptable considering that formaldehyde, a preservative classified as a carcinogen, has been known to cause health problems at high levels.

The station's findings are also disturbing considering FEMA's troubling pattern of health and safety problems with trailers you've provided in the past to victims of natural disasters. As a member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, I've been following the issue of unsafe levels of formaldehyde in FEMA trailers closely for over a year now, and working to ensure that temporary housing provided to disaster victims is safe and healthy.

At a July 19, 2007 hearing, the Oversight Committee heard testimony from displaced Gulf Coast hurricane victims, who testified that FEMA-provided trailers with high levels of formaldehyde caused them to experience nose bleeds, watery eyes, respiratory problems, and flu-like symptoms. These victims also testified that these adverse health effects were common for families living in FEMA-provided trailers in the Gulf Coast.

The July 19th hearing also highlighted troubling facts about FEMA's unresponsiveness, including an unwillingness to test trailers for formaldehyde, and the release of a public statement discounting any risk associated with formaldehyde exposure. The Committee's hearing and investigation ultimately found that FEMA failed to adequately respond to reports of problems with the trailers in the Gulf Coast. I'm sure you remember that you admitted at that hearing that FEMA "could have moved faster," and that you made a commitment to address the problem of formaldehyde in FEMA trailers.

Then, in July 2008, it was discovered that over 100 FEMA-provided trailers in Iowa were infected with mold. It is very disturbing that the mold in the trailers was not discovered before they were delivered to their designated locations, and concerning that Iowans lived in these trailers for a period of time before the mold was discovered.

Given the troubling history of documented health and safety problems with FEMA-provided trailers, the October 22, 2008 statement released by FEMA implying that the high levels of formaldehyde in the tested Iowa trailers were caused by residents is surprising and offensive. It

is also unacceptable that FEMA has not yet volunteered to conduct further testing or take other steps to ensure that trailers provided to Iowa disaster victims are safe.

With such a dismal record of providing housing units with high levels of formaldehyde and mold, FEMA should be going above and beyond expectations to prove and ensure that your trailers are safe for Iowans. However, it currently appears that FEMA is being unresponsive to the reports of unsafe levels of formaldehyde in Iowa trailers, and repeating the same mistakes your agency made in the Gulf Coast.

It is critical at this time that we have all of the facts about FEMA trailers in Iowa, and that FEMA is doing everything possible to protect the health and safety of Iowans displaced by this year's floods and tornadoes. That is why I request that you immediately produce the written pre-distribution formaldehyde test results for each trailer in question. I also request that FEMA or an independent and reputable testing lab re-test all of the trailers in question, and make available testing for all other FEMA trailers in Iowa, to ensure that all FEMA trailers in the state are safe and habitable.

I am sure that you will agree with me that Iowans displaced from their homes by this year's disasters deserve safe housing, and that they should be able to have confidence that FEMA will be helpful to them during this difficult time, not harmful to their health. Re-testing these trailers is essential to restoring confidence in your agency and to protecting the health and safety of Iowans affected by this year's disasters.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Bruce Braley

Member of Congress

